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Wait, William Bell

The education of the blind

New York

1880

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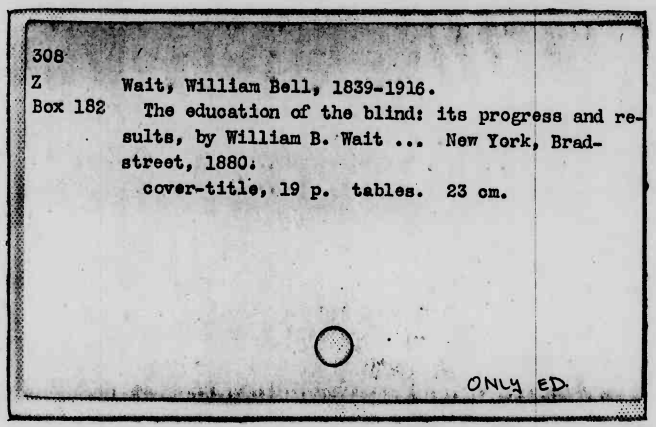
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THE

Education of the Blind:

ITS PROGRESS AND RESULTS.

BY

WILLIAM B. WAIT,

Superintendent of the New York Institution for the Blind.

NEW YORK:
THE BRADSTREET COMPANY, 279, 281 & 283 BROADWAY.
1880.

THE EDUCATION OF THE BLIND—ITS PROGRESS AND RESULTS.

It is now about ninety-five years since the education of the blind in special schools was begun. If at that time there had been nothing in the condition of society and of the blind necessitating such an effort, or if the effort had been the expression of impracticable philanthropy, a very few years would have sufficed to demonstrate that the effort was not based on any real need. It would have died for the want of support. The Abbe Hauy would have had no successors. His effort would have been the first and the last.

But such has not been the case. The school founded at Paris nearly a century ago still remains, and is pre-eminent among the schools for the blind in Europe, which number at this time upwards of eighty.

In the United States it was not until 1832 that the first school for the blind was opened in New York City. At the present time there are twenty-eight schools for the blind in the United States, two in Canada, one in Nova Scotia, one in Mexico; while in the South American States several organizations have been formed for the purpose of promoting the education of the blind. Thriving schools have also been formed in Australia. Similar efforts are being made in China and Japan, and with the establishment of schools

in these countries there will have been established on every continent, and in almost every country, one of the most beneficent enterprises of modern civilization.

In connection with the wide establishment of schools for the blind, the invention of a suitable apparatus and the formation of a permanent literature in such form as to be available to all blind persons eligible to receive school instruction, have from the first been regarded as objects of the highest importance.

Much has been done in Europe and in this country in this direction by both private and public enterprise.

But the highest recognition ever given to this work of educating the blind, and the most valuable contribution ever made for the purpose of carrying it on, are embodied in an act of the Forty-fifth Congress of the United States, which established a permanent fund, the annual interest on which, amounting to ten thousand dollars, is to be distributed among the several Institutions for the Blind in the United States, in the form of books and apparatus adapted to the use of the blind. The passage of the act making this grant, the wisdom of which was conceded by the almost unanimous voice of both Houses of Congress, was brought about by the American Association of Instructors of the blind, through a committee, consisting of B. B. HUNTOON, of Kentucky; F. D. MORRISON, of Maryland; W. D. WILLIAMS, of Georgia; WM. CHAPIN, of Pennsylvania, and WM. B. WAIT, of New York. The bill was introduced by the Hon. ALBERT S. WILLIS, of Kentucky, to whom the institutions and the blind

of the country are indebted for his untiring efforts in securing the passage of the bill.

With the purpose of ascertaining what has been done, and what still needs to be done in the United States for the education of this class, I have prepared the following table, which shows the number of blind persons of school age in each State in 1878, by estimate based upon the census returns of 1870. The table also shows the number of pupils attending the several schools for the blind in the United States in 1878, according to the information at hand:

TABLE No. 1.

1878.	10 to 20 years...	Pupils in 1878.	Per cent. under instruction....	1878.	10 to 20 years...	Pupils in 1878.	Per cent. under instruction....
Maine	35			Nevada	3	0	0
New Hampshire	15			Oregon†	7	11	150
Vermont	17	129	64	California	70	33	47
Massachusetts	92			Missouri	231	107	46
Rhode Island	17			Kentucky	213	85	39
Connecticut	27			West Virginia	31	20	64
New York	402	381	94	Virginia	101	37	36
New Jersey	52	37	71	Maryland and District of Columbia	130	73	56
Delaware	7	2	28	North Carolina	151	52	34
Pennsylvania	336	158	41	Tennessee	148	58	37
Ohio	231	154	66	Arkansas	101	43	42
Indiana	293	115	39	Texas	73	65	88
Illinois	258	98	37	Louisian	67	22	32
Iowa*†	90	125	138	Mississippi	85	35	41
Kansas†	29	41	140	Alabama	112	13	11
Nebraska	7	0	0	Georgia	140	54	38
Michigan	69	51	73	South Carolina	57	33	57
Wisconsin	111	91	81	Florida	20	0	0
Minnesota	28	20	70				

* The age of pupils at admission ranged from 6 to 42 years.

† In these States the number receiving instruction in 1878 exceeded the number between the ages of ten and twenty years. The excess in these cases is made up of those under ten, or over twenty years of age.

The period during which the blind may properly be received into schools designed for their instruction may be said to be between the ages of eight and twenty years. In some cases, only those between the ages of eight and sixteen are deemed eligible, while in one State children at six and adults upwards of forty years of age are received as pupils.

For the purpose, however, of showing approximately the extent to which the blind children of the several States have been provided with educational advantages, I shall assume the number requiring such provision to be those between the ages of ten and twenty years; accordingly, it appears that the percentage of this number who were receiving instruction in each of the several States in 1878 was as follows:

TABLE No. 2.

	PER CENT.		PER CENT.
Maine	32	Florida	...
New Hampshire	60	New York	94
Vermon	42	New Jersey	71
Massachusetts*	138	Delaware	28
Rhode Island	60	Pennsylvania	41
Connecticut	52	Ohio	66
Average for New England	64	Indiana	39
Illinois	37	Iowa*	138
Nebraska	...	Kansas*	140
Wisconsin	81	Michigan	73
Nevada	...	Minnesota	70
California	47	Oregon*	150
Kentucky	39	Maryland	46
Virginia	36	West Virginia	64
North Carolina	52	Maryland and Dist. Columbia.	73
Tennessee	58	Arkansas	43
Texas	65	Louisiana	22
Mississippi	35	Alabama	13
Georgia	54	South Carolina	33

* See Note (†) on preceding page.

Excluding the small percentage of those of school age who are mentally or physically disqualified, it is evident that there are still many young blind persons growing up in ignorance; and it is important that means should be provided for seeking them out and bringing them under educational training in schools for the blind. It is sometimes suggested that the blind child may be sent to the schools for the seeing. Undoubtedly, he may be sent to such schools, but to what purpose? There are some benefits which may be derived by a blind child from associating with seeing children in a seeing school, and the converse of this proposition is equally true. But no one would think for a moment of sending a seeing child to a school for the blind, no matter how beneficial might be the oral teaching, the mental exercises, or the discipline; and any one acquainted with the routine management and appliances of seeing schools, and with the methods of teaching and learning therein pursued, and who is at all conversant with the physical and mental condition of the blind, well knows that it would be neither feasible nor wise to attempt the co-education of seeing and blind children. Whatever may be the benefits which may accrue to a blind child from attending a seeing school, it cannot be that he should attend such a school from first to last for the purposes of education.

From seven to ten years of age such a course might be pursued, *with suitable facilities*, with good results. For certain purposes, and under favorable circumstances as to means and helps, a course of study in the high school or college for the seeing, may be taken

with success, after the course at the special school has been completed.

But for the great mass of blind children *education can never be provided except in special schools.* On this subject Mr. Moldenhower, the able Superintendent of the Institute at Copenhagen, in a paper read at a meeting of Educators of the Blind, held at Paris in 1878, says: "Can the blind be educated in schools for the seeing? It has been said that it is better for the blind to frequent during some years such a school, in order to learn to live among the seeing, and so to be prepared for life in the world. But it is evident that the education of a blind child could not be so complete in such a school as in an institution where everything is directed towards supplying the loss of sight; and as to the supposed advantages of living in the midst of seeing children, I believe it to be an illusion.

"In a class of seeing children, the blind child is isolated. He has not the same basis for the acquisition of knowledge as the seeing, and consequently the necessary point of comparison is wanting for both the pupil and the teacher, in order to judge of the progress of the former. The situation of a blind child in a school for the seeing is too abnormal to allow of his developing in what is a normal manner for him, which is necessary to render him capable of living in the world, and gaining his bread by his labor. But, on the other hand, in an Institution for the Blind, the child deprived of sight lives with those like himself, which gives him the same fundamental conditions of a normal development, as is given to the seeing in the ordinary school.

"Hence I say, with M. Gaudet, the former worthy Superintendent of the Institution for the young blind in Paris, 'that attendance by the blind at the schools for the seeing is only a matter of convenience and not of preference.'"

RESULTS OF EDUCATION.

A school is the medium by which the forces of education are put into operation and exerted upon the mind and character of those who are committed to its care. It has no power to confer upon the pupil either intellect or the essential elements of character. These are the endowments of nature. Education serves to develop and put into effective use the mental faculties and physical powers, to correct bad habits, to restrain and, if possible, to eradicate such traits of character as are evil, and to mould and confirm such as are good. When every reasonable effort has been made, with all patience and within reasonable limits of time, to produce these results, the obligation of the school to the pupil and the community ceases.

It may be expected that the influence of every school will be seen in the usefulness and improved social condition of its pupils in after life; and yet no school is responsible for the ill success or bad behavior of those whom it has instructed.

It dispenses its benefits equally to all, but who can say what the future of those who receive will bring forth?

Opportunities are seized and improved by some;

by others they are misapplied or recklessly squandered.

The same gift of knowledge may be well used, may remain unused, or be misused. If well used, prosperity is the result; if unused or misused, waste, dependence, degradation and vice are the necessary consequences.

With the purpose of ascertaining the practical effects of education, as shown by the pursuits of the blind in after life, a committee was appointed by the American Association of Instructors of the Blind to collect statistics. The result is shown in the following statement of the occupations pursued by blind persons, educated in American schools for the blind, and the number engaged in each:

TABLE No. 3.

Superintendents of institutions for the blind	16
Superintendents of orphan asylums	6
Teachers of literature in schools other than for the blind	49
Teachers of literature or music in schools for the blind	115
Otherwise employed in schools for the blind	39
Teachers in public schools	13
Students attending college or theological seminary	10
Graduates from colleges and theological seminaries	18
Ministers	36
Studying or practicing law	5
Justice of the peace	1
Editors	2
Authors	17
Publishers	8
Agents and lecturers	70
Teachers of music elsewhere than at institutions	463
Church organists	88
Piano tuners	125
Composers and publishers of music	14
Teachers of handicraft in institutions	20

Engaged in manufacturing	305
Working at handicraft	702
Storekeeping and trading	269
Owning and managing real estate	59
Sawing and lumbering	7
Farmers	59
Teachers and operators of knitting machines	3
Employed by sewing machine companies	2
Hotel-keeper	1
Housekeepers	205
Insurance brokers	2
Newspaper venders	7
Physicians and medical students	6
Stock operator	1
Dealers in musical instruments	6
Carpenter	1
Employed in printing office	2
Employed in sash and blind factory	1
Florist	1
Switch tenders	2
Cabinet makers	2
Mail contractors and carriers	2
Assistant in restaurant	1
Sailor and cook	1
Horse dealers	9
Usefully employed at home	666

The information here given shows that there is a wide range of pursuits in which the educated blind may promote their own welfare, and also contribute to the comfort and well-being of society.

It also affords gratifying evidence of the good accomplished by institutions founded for the special training of the blind.

But, in addition to this positive evidence that education ameliorates the condition of the blind by fitting them for the domestic circle and for social life, and by opening to them the path to business pursuits, there is also evidence to be derived from facts concerning the

condition of the dependent blind in the alms-houses of this State, a census of which I have just completed.

On October 31st, 1879, the number of blind persons in the alms-houses of the State was as follows:

Albany	5	Oneida	9
Allegheny	1	Onondaga	7
Broome	7	Ontario	2
Cattaraugus		Orange	6
Chenango	4	Orleans	4
Cayuga	1	Oswego	3
Chatauqua	5	Otsego	1
Chemung	2	Putnam	2
Clinton	2	Queens	3
Columbia	6	Rensselaer	2
Cortland	6	Richmond	1
Delaware	1	Rockland	1
Duchess	5	Saratoga	3
Erie	8	Seneca	
Essex	6	Shoharie	1
Franklin		Schenectady	3
Fulton	1	Suffolk	2
Greene	2	Sullivan	2
Genesee		Steuben	3
Herkimer		St Lawrence	5
Jefferson	3	Tioga	
Kings	16	Tompkins	1
Lewis	1	Ulster	8
Livingston	4	Wayne	3
Madison	1	Washington	3
Monroe	18	Wayne	1
Montgomery	5	Westchester	3
New York	111	Wyoming	1
Niagara	3	Yates	2

The age at which sight was lost in these cases was as follows:

At birth	14	4.5	per cent.
Between 1 and 10 years of age	9	2.9	"
" 10 " 20 "	14	4.5	"
" 20 " 30 "	30	9.7	"
" 30 " 40 "	44	14.4	"
" 40 " 50 "	53	17.2	"
" 50 " 60 "	57	18.5	"
" 60 " 70 "	46	15.2	"
" 70 " 80 "	26	8 6	"
" 80 " 90 "	14	4.5	"
	307	100.0	"

The number in each decade of life is as follows:

Between 10 and 20 years of age	3	.9	per cent.
" 20 " 30 "	12	3.9	"
" 30 " 40 "	22	7.2	"
" 40 " 50 "	44	14.4	"
" 50 " 60 "	64	20.9	"
" 60 " 70 "	69	22.2	"
" 70 " 80 "	66	21.7	"
" 80 " 90 "	23	7.5	"
" 90 " 100 "	4	1.3	"
	307	100.0	"

The period of attendance at schools for the seeing before loss of sight was as follows:

Number who attended 1 year	10	3.2	per cent.
" " " 2 years	13	4.3	"
" " " 3 "	21	6.8	"
" " " 4 "	20	6.5	"
" " " 5 "	24	7.8	"
" " " 6 "	17	5.2	"
" " " 7 "	11	3.7	"
" " " 8 "	16	5.3	"
" " " 9 "	8	2.7	"
" " " 10 "	14	4.5	"
" " " 11 "			
" " " 12 "	2	.7	"
" " " 13 "			
" " " 14 "	3	.9	"

Average period of attendance.....5.5 years.

Number who never attended any school..159 or 51.8 per cent. of the whole.

The period of attendance at some school for the blind was as follows:

Number who attended 1 year					
"	"	"	2	years	3
"	"	"	3	"	1
"	"	"	4	"	5
"	"	"	5	"	2
"	"	"	6	"	4
"	"	"	7	"	3
"	"	"	8	"	
"	"	"	9	"	2
"	"	"	10	"	1

Number who attended some school for the blind, 21 or 6.8 per cent. of the whole.

Average period of attendance at school for the blind 4.9 years.

The number who attended both schools for the seeing and schools for the blind, and the period of attendance, was as follows:

1	attended	school	for	seeing	1	year,	for	blind	4	years,	total	5	years.
1	"	"	"	"	1	"	"	"	6	"	"	7	"
1	"	"	"	"	2	"	"	"	5	"	"	7	"
2	"	"	"	"	4	"	"	"	4	"	"	8	"
1	"	"	"	"	1	"	"	"	9	"	"	10	"
1	"	"	"	"	7	"	"	"	3	"	"	10	"
1	"	"	"	"	6	"	"	"	4	"	"	10	"
1	"	"	"	"	5	"	"	"	6	"	"		"
1	"	"	"	"	9	"	"	"	2	"	"	11	"
1	"	"	"	"	2	"	"	"	9	"	"	11	"
1	"	"	"	"	10	"	"	"	2	"	"	12	"

Average period of attendance at school for seeing.....4.3 "

" " " " " " blind.....4.5 "

" " " " " " both.....8.8 "

The occupations of the 146 male blind persons before losing sight were as follows:

Artist	1	Miner	1
Baker	1	Oysterman	1
Blacksmiths	4	Painter	1
Butcher	1	Plasterer	1
Boatman	1	Peddler	1
Contractor	1	Quarrymen	2
Carpenters	2	Sailors	2
Cloth presser	1	Stone cutters	3
Coopers	2	Soldier	1
Clerk	1	Ship carpenter	1
Drover	1	Sail maker	1
Druggist	1	Tinsmiths	2
Farmers	18	Tailors	4
Fireman	1	Teamsters	3
Hostler	1	Watchmen	2
Laborers	76	Weaver	1
Letter carrier	1	Watch maker	1
Masons	4	Total	146

The occupations of the 121 blind females in the same alms-houses was as follows:

Artificial flower maker	1
Housework	109
Seamstresses	9
Type rubber	1
Wool sorter	1
	121

Of the 307 blind inmates of almshouses October 30th, 1879, 267, or 86.8 per cent., are set down as having pursued some useful or skilled occupation before losing their sight. Of the remaining (40) who are said to have had no occupation, 3 are insane, and 37 were either born blind or lost sight before arriving at the age of twenty years, and hence had not the same opportunity to acquire an occupation as the others had.

According to an enumeration made in 1878, the number of paupers in the State of New York, exclusive of the blind, was 12,311. Of this number 1,447 had learned to read; 2,384 could read and write, and 2,918 had received a fair education.

Here we find that 6,749, or 54.8 per cent. of all these sighted paupers, had been the recipients of instruction, and had become paupers, notwithstanding the benefits which the education of the seeing schools have superadded to the natural advantages of sight.

Of the 307 blind paupers in 1879, 159, or 51.8 per cent., had attended schools for the seeing during their years of sight, and 21, or 6.8 per cent., had attended schools for the blind—making a total of 58.8 per cent. who had received instruction at school.

Of the blind who had attended seeing schools, one was also deaf and dumb; three were insane, and some are known to have been intemperate or suffering from other causes of dependence which would account for their pauperized situation. It will be observed that the number of blind paupers who had attended school was 58.8 per cent. of all; and the corresponding class of sighted paupers was 54.8 per cent. of all. Although the difference is small, still it is apparent that blindness, unaccompanied by any other physical infirmity, or by mental disorder or vicious habits, strongly tends to render dependent those who are afflicted by it.

From inquiry concerning the antecedents and mental and other characteristics of the 21 blind inmates of alms-houses, 9 of whom have been taught in schools for the blind only, and 12 in both classes of

schools; it appears that 9 had been inmates of alms-houses before entering a school for the blind; and of these, 6 were full orphans, 1 was half-orphan, and 2 had been abandoned. Of the others, 2 were half orphans, 1 having been abandoned; 2 were known to have had intemperate parents, the transmitted effects of which were very apparent; 6 exhibited vicious tendencies of a well-marked character; 2 were feeble-minded almost to idiocy, and 6 were mediocre and evil-disposed.

Even if these 21 had retained their sight, it is more than probable that 16 of the number would eventually have become dependent, through hereditary degradation and other causes; and yet a school for the blind was the only means by which an attempt to rescue these unfortunates could be made. The first class of blind persons in the United States upon whom the beneficent influence of education was systematically exerted, was composed of children who had been left to the care of public charity by early orphanage.

Since then, forty-eight years have elapsed. Some of the number are still living; one of whom, after an unpromising pupilage, quickly relapsed into the state of dependence from which he was taken, and is to-day an inmate of the alms-house. Another gave promise of a better future. He has attained places both honorable and responsible—has been useful in every community in which he has lived, and has the respect and esteem of all who know him.

By means of this Institution, the youthful years of both were invested with good influences, and with

every available advantage. With the aid of the Institution, and by the proper use of its advantages, one was enabled to adorn his life with usefulness; while without it, there would have been no escape from dependence, and he would have been a helpless, though unwilling, sharer in the hopeless estate of the other.

In the work of education the apparent result in unpromising cases may not compensate the effort. Nevertheless, no child should be yielded up to a life of dependence without an effort to rescue it therefrom, care being taken that the means employed are neither too limited nor too lavish.

Blind persons are not the only ones who become dependent, notwithstanding the benefits of education conferred upon them.

Of the 9,552 seeing paupers over 16 years of age in the State in 1878, 629 had followed agricultural pursuits; 1,421 were mechanics; 185 came from the commercial walks of life, and 109 were professional men; while 5,930 had engaged in various kinds of labor—making a total of 8,274, or more than 87 per cent., who, in spite of their sight, skill or learning, have still become dependents.

By reference to table No. 3 it is seen that of those who have been educated in schools for the blind 59 became farmers; 11 were students or practitioners of law or medicine; one was a justice of the peace, and a large number were engaged in teaching and in other pursuits requiring a high order of intelligence and ability and good social qualities

The contrast is striking. In one direction we see

a stream of sighted men abandoning their labor in the field, the workshop, the store or counting-room, or their practice in medicine, law or other profession, and pouring into the stagnant pool of pauperism. In the other, we see a stream of persons, mostly children, and already defective, seeking education in these special schools, and then going out to become the owners of land and successful farmers; to organize industry and to employ sighted labor; to become teachers, doctors, lawyers or clergymen, and to engage in many other pursuits in business or domestic life.

More than 1,200 persons have been instructed and have gone out from the Institutions for the Blind in this State, only 21 of whom were found to be in alms-houses on the 30th of October, 1879.

Such facts give great force to a statement made by the Board of State Commissioners of Public Charities upon this subject. They say: "As observation shows that educated blind persons seldom become a public charge, it would seem important, not only in its social bearings, but as a question of political economy, to bring *as many of the blind as practicable under proper educational training.*"

But it must not be supposed that blindness is not a cause of dependence. This affliction is very depressing in its effects, especially upon those who lose their sight in adult life. In the case of children, blindness has a repressing rather than a depressing effect, so that the faculties are confined and canno expand, nor be controlled or utilized. until education obviates the

hindrance and affords scope for their free and well-regulated action.

Special schools are the only hope of the young blind of our country.

Upon those who lose their sight in adult life, the effect is both depressing and repressing—sometimes to the extent of entire disqualification. While no needful provision for the instruction of blind *children* should be withheld, it is also true that both private and public philanthropy should be exercised, in wise and prudent ways, to ameliorate the condition of the adult class.

Upon this point, I again quote from a report of the State Board of Charities. After reviewing some statistics similar to those herein given, they say: "It would seem that other than these (educational) institutions should be provided for the custody and care of the adult blind, *and such as are unsuited for the educational* institutions."

There are three fundamental principles which should never be waived, ignored or violated, in providing for or aiding those who have passed the limits of school age:

First—As the schools for the young blind seek to prepare them for usefulness, and to incite them to activity and self-helpfulness, every effort to aid and encourage them should be supplemental to the work of the schools, and such as will tend to make them industrious and self-reliant. Special pains have been taken to make this portion of a defective class useful; and care must be exercised that this object be not

defeated by holding out incentives to dependence, rather than to usefulness.

Second—In the order of nature, all the defective classes are distributed quite evenly among the entire population. This should be recognized as the normal condition of these classes in society, and distributive aid should be practiced in all possible cases as the most economical and most beneficial method of affording assistance, because it meets the wants of the individual, while at the same time it harmonizes with the natural constitution of society.

Third—The congregate system should be adopted in order to carry into effect educational, reformatory, or curative measures, or when no safe, suitable and comfortable station in society can be provided for the beneficiary. In such cases, recourse must be had to the congregate plan, in order to insure safe custody and the administration of proper care.

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